

# ECO Conference 2010 - Planning for the Future

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How do we plan for a better environment, a better society, and a better economy? These were some of the questions debated at the recent Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand (ECO) conference held in Christchurch.

Delegates from around the country contributed to the conference theme of 'Foundations for the Future' aimed at the sharing of information between community groups and academics. There were many local groups present to share their ideas and experience in helping Canterbury make good decisions for the future, amounting to a wealth of experience in making practical change happen alongside the more academic contributors. The result was a lively exploration of future-focused issues producing a number of valuable perspectives on appropriate directions for the future.

The conference worked towards an appraisal of key issues for appropriate management of the environment, conservation and the economy. Some of the subjects debated included the use of non-market values in economics, water management and marine issues, the relationship between biodiversity management and tourism, and the effects of recent changes to regional decision-making policy.

The relationship between poor environmental and conservation measures and risks to the economy was an issue raised by many presenters. For example, amongst the points made by Kay Booth, a tourism consultant and former senior lecturer in parks, recreation and tourism was that "seventy percent of overseas tourists are here for nature-based activities, and nature-based international tourists stay longer and spend more than other tourists". A key conclusion was that the value of the environment to society and the economy must be better identified and protected in the future, and that this perspective is not well reflected in the current government's policy.

Topics in the spotlight included both the content of, and the process by which recent government policy changes were made. In particular, many contentious issues surfacing in the resource management field were explored. A concern for many is the example of whether the Environmental Protection Agency will produce a bonafide improvement in New Zealand's environmental management infrastructure, or in reality is being designed to fast track infrastructure projects for the government and vested business interests.

Many delegates also identified that a trend exists towards the erosion of the rights of people to be consulted and considered. For example, public policy specialist Cath Wallace noted that "there is increasing concern that economic interests are being privileged while citizen values and voices are being shut out of policy and decision making". Many of these issues were also addressed by representatives from National, Labour and the Green Party who contributed greatly to the exploration of ideas through their Party's perspectives on priorities for the future. The conclusion of many was that the suppression of community voice in addition to several elements in the government's

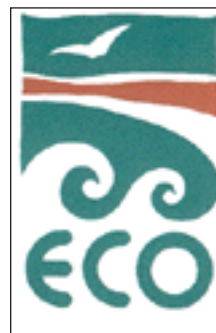
current economic strategy, are amongst the key issues posing considerable risk for not only the environment, but for a prosperous society.

With a focus on the future the Conference was especially interested in 'where to from here?' and also in celebrating some of the good work already underway. Despite the considerable disquiet which emerged concerning public policy, there was no shortage of success stories from the local presenters. These illustrated some of the practical ways in which planning for the future might be delivered in 'on-the-ground' activities. Promising future directions in regional and national level policy were also highlighted, such as the move towards water metering in Canterbury and resource efficiency in general.

The Environment and Conservation Organisations of NZ was established in 1972 and now represents 66 groups with a concern for the environment. ECO is an umbrella organization providing a network between member groups as well as several resources to assist local groups in their activities. Working groups from across the network are also used to advance projects on common interests including submissions on public policy issues. Through their conference ECO also provide a national summit to explore contemporary ideas important to environmental management.

To find out more visit [www.eco.org.nz](http://www.eco.org.nz) or contact Amelia on [eco@eco.org](mailto:eco@eco.org) or (04) 385 7545.

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